

Farm-Raised Tuna from Mexico Increasingly On Japanese Menu

TOKYO (Nikkei)--Farm-raised Bluefin tuna from Mexico is gaining credibility and popularity in Japan for sushi and sashimi, aided by competitive pricing and burgeoning supplies. In years past, Mexican farm-raised Bluefin was considered to be of lower quality than that raised in Japan and Spain. But the fish shipped this season have been large, and more buyers at the wholesale markets have been tempted to give them a try.

The season for farm-raised Bluefin tuna air-imported from Mexico runs from fall to spring, and this year the supplies have been ample as more growers have gotten into the business. Nearly 7,000 tuna were shipped from Mexico to Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market between January and April -- up six-fold from the same period last year. They accounted for nearly 70% of all farm-raised Bluefin tuna available at Tsukiji, compared with less than 30% last year.

Fueling the surge in use of Mexican farm-raised Bluefin tuna was a 30% drop in wholesale prices to less than 2,000 yen a kilogram that took place between last fall and the end of the year. With the tuna from Japan and Spain selling for over 1,000 yen/kg more, the comparative bargain was enough to persuade many conveyor-belt sushi restaurants and supermarkets to offer Bluefin tuna to their customers.

Wholesale prices have recovered 20-30% over the past two months. Mexican farm-raised Bluefin tuna is now selling for around 2,300 yen/kg at Tsukiji.

Buyers are increasingly switching to Mexican imports. Last year, sashimi from Spanish and Japanese tuna sold for 1,280 yen per 100 grams in Tokyo's supermarkets. This year they are selling Mexican tuna sashimi at around 980 yen/100g.

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